

## Sermon by Rev. Anthony Weisman – May 11, 2025

### Acts 9:36-42

### Remembrance and Resurrection

As tradition has it, Easter is not a Sunday, but a season. The trumpet fanfare and festive lilies and pews full of squirming children in floral dresses and little seersucker suits make for a big day, but this is only the beginning. For the next seven Sundays – almost two months of them, most of spring, really – for the next seven Sundays of what we call *Easter tide*, the church celebrates the coming forth of Christ from the tomb. Seven Sundays of celebrating! That is a lot of celebrating!

We celebrate the resurrection. We sing hymns of joy. We do not hold back with the hallelujahs. Let me hear you say, *hallelujah*. Hmm. Well, that was okay. But let me hear you say *HALLELUJAH!* We celebrate the resurrection. And we go on celebrating, go *on and on* celebrating the resurrection because the hope and the gladness it stirs up in us is too much for one Sunday morning only. We celebrate the resurrection, and we contemplate the resurrection. We contemplate it. For seven Sundays, all through the season of Eastertide, we contemplate it. We ponder the promise of new life, and we meditate on what it might mean for us. Christ has come forth, free from the tomb, so we, too, can come forth, free from whatever would entomb us.

What is it we need to be freed from? What is it *you* need to be freed from? We linger with questions like these. We linger, too, with questions for which there are no answers: how could it be? what really happened? Some of us, like doubting Thomas, may struggle to believe, may be unsure of what we believe. But we contemplate the resurrection. And we go on contemplating, go *on and on* contemplating the resurrection, because the wonder it gives rise to is too much for one Sunday morning only.

The wisdom of this tradition, this tradition of staying with the Easter story, is in its recognition of the ‘too-much-ness’ of the resurrection, the ‘*so-much-ness*’ of the resurrection: there is so much to celebrate, so much to be thankful for, so much to think about. And Eastertide gives us the time for it. Eastertide gives us the time to look again into the empty tomb, to look again and again into the empty tomb, and to see truths and possibilities for our lives we might otherwise have missed.

When the Apostle Paul talks about the resurrection he says, ‘*Behold, I tell you a mystery...*’ Resurrection is a mystery – a great mystery. There is so much to it, there is so much more to it than we will ever be able to see; there is so much more to it than we will ever be able to understand. Resurrection can mean so many things, can mean so many different things, can mean so many different things to so many different people. It is like when you hold a prism to the light and turn it and turn it, turn it this way and that, and with every turn see the light refracted anew, see red, then green, then blue, see such a surprising burst of color.

Resurrection is like that. If you turn it and turn it and turn it, if you turn it over in your mind, you will see God’s truth and God’s promises in a new and ever new light. In this morning’s scripture reading, we see one thing that resurrection can mean – not *the* thing, not the *only* thing resurrection can mean, but one thing, one of many things that resurrection can mean. In this

morning's scripture reading, we see one thing that, if we let the light refract through it just so – we see one thing that resurrection can look like.

In this scripture reading, in this story from the book of Acts, a woman named Dorcas, or Tabitha (given then choice, probably most of us would rather be a Tabitha than a Dorcas, which has a certain... ring to it) – Tabitha died. And Tabitha was a remarkable woman, a dearly loved saint whose faith was as deep as her embrace of the poor and needy was open and wide. Tabitha was a good and generous person, compassionate and kind.

So when she passed, there was an outpouring of grief. Peter was sent for and, as the story goes, Peter came to Tabitha's body and Peter raised her up; Peter brought her back to life. Now, the first thing to note is that *resurrection* is seen as something one person is capable of “doing” for another. Resurrection life is a gift that Peter gives Tabitha. He makes resurrection life “happen” for her.

Easter, evidently, is not so much a Sunday as a power that we can tap into. We can bring people back to life, can bring people back to themselves in all kinds of ways. We can be the difference for someone between hope and despair, between resilience and resignation, between life and a living death. Many of us, on Mother's Day, likely find ourselves remembering how our moms have been just this difference for us: how they have been the difference between making it and not making it through, between the sadness wiped from eyes and being alone in our pain. Many of us, on Mother's Day, likely find ourselves remembering the women who gave us life not only once, but who gave us life over and over and over again, who made Easter “happen” for us with every kiss of love where it hurt the most.

Let's stay with this idea of *remembering*. Because, while this story from the book of Acts is a story of resurrection, while it is story of Easter power and Easter triumph, some of the wonderful little details in it let us see resurrection and see Easter power and see Easter triumph in a new light.

Before Peter arrived, some of the women who had known Tabitha and loved Tabitha tended to her body. They closed her eyes and lifted her up together and laid her out and gently washed the dying from her body. They lavished fragrant ointments and oils upon her. They prepared her for burial. And probably they did what many of us have done when sitting beside one we love who has died: probably they took her hand, pushed the hair back from her face, kissed her forehead, said goodbye, and wept.

When Peter was shown in, the women were there, were already there, were still there – and they told stories about Tabitha. They told *him* stories about Tabitha: about who she was, about how she lived, about the good she had done, about the sacrifices she had made, about what she meant to them and what she meant to so many.

They lifted up the ordinary stuff of her life. They showed Peter some of the things that had been Tabitha's, the small treasures that they would remember her by; they showed him Tabitha's handiwork and the clothing she had made just to give away to the poor. They remembered how Tabitha had come alive when she blessed others. They remembered the countless hours she had

poured into her ministry of mercy and care. Maybe they spoke of how much they had admired her Tabitha and of how she inspired them. Maybe they spoke of how she had been something of a mother to them.

This story from the book of Acts draws the scene of the women gathered there with a beautiful tenderness. Before there was Peter, there was *the women*. Before there was resurrection, there was *remembering*. Remembering. This story from the book of Acts sets remembering and resurrection snugly side by side so that it is almost impossible to say where the one ends and the other begins.

Did Tabitha live again because Peter said ‘get up!’ – or did Tabitha *live on* in the women who remembered her selfless devotion and dedicated themselves to service in turn? And is the one really any more a show of Easter power and Easter triumph than the other? Maybe it is as if this story from the book of Acts wants us to see that when we remember, when we tell stories about that one time when, you know..., that when we sit together, sharing memories and laughing, laughing and laughing until all at the same time everyone falls silent and sighs and smiles to themselves, to see that when we pull out the old, faded photographs or set the table with grandma’s bone china or make the wisecrack Dad would or follow Mom’s recipe, when we *remember* who they were and how they lived and the good they did and the sacrifices they made and what they meant to us – what they still, *still* mean to us – it is as if this story from the book of Acts wants us to see that when we remember, we practice resurrection.

When we remember, those who have left us live on. Their joy, their jokes, their strength, their spirits – they live on *in us*, even as they live on in and with God, whom the scriptures say is as a Mother Hen who gathers all her children under the shelter of her wings. And so love lives on – theirs for us, and ours for them – it lives on. Love outlives death. *Love outlives death*. Let me hear you say *hallelujah*. Say it again: *hallelujah*. Amen.

The church is sometimes likened to a mother: to one who feeds us with the bread of life, who washes us in the waters of baptism, and to whom we turn for guidance and for comfort. In gratitude to God for the mothering and care of *this* church, the morning’s offering will be given and received.